DIGITAL MEDIA

Inside

Electronic Publishing on the 'Net'

Today, vast stores of information are freely available through a worldwide series of interconnected digital networks called the Internet. The Internet paradigm is increasingly being eyed by information publishers, telephone companies and computer vendors as a powerful platform for a new form of electronic publishing, where the network is more than a means to move data from the desktop to a printer. Instead, the network is where the information resides.

But what happens when information — the contents of a public library, for example, most of which is protected by copyright laws designed for print — is digitized and posted on public networks? At this point, not much. And what we do about electronic copyrights today will have great effect on the electronic publishing market of the future.

Where There's a Will, There's a WAIS

In 1989, Thinking Machines Corp. — the company that builds the Connection Machine supercomputer — set Brewster Kahle loose on the problem of catalyzing a market for the electronic distribution of information.

First and foremost, the infrastructure had to allow people to make money at electronic publishing. Second, it needed to be elastic enough to support anything from personal computers to consumer electronics devices to supercomputers. And third, it needed to be completely accessible and autonomous — i.e., there was to be no single point of control.

Kahle's project, dubbed WAIS (pronounced "ways"), for Wide Area Information Servers, is already well on its way to achieving those goals.

The Reading Room: A Model for Access

In this provocative essay, WAIS project director Brewster Kahle offers his views on the clash between private ownership of information, the foundation of the so-called Information Age, and public access to information, which has been the cornerstone of democracy. He suggests we investigate a new model for public libraries, called the Reading Room.